

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

In the course of a conference given on January 20th, at Zurich, Federal President Stampfli stated that there were no definite indications as to the nature of the economic and social problems that would have to be faced after the war. However, the authorities were not entirely unprepared and agriculture would continue to remain our principal concern. As regards economic prospects it would be some time before new commercial treaties could be negotiated and could become operative. The creation of opportunities for employment would be our immediate anxiety and over one milliard francs had been earmarked for this purpose. A revision of the factory law, over thirty years old, was under consideration and old age and dependants insurance would have to be established as a Federal measure.

* * *

The war has brought a very considerable increase in the number of civil servants employed by our government. The ordinary administrative personnel has risen from about 42,000 to 49,000 while an additional 10,000 have found work in the special departments necessitated by war conditions.

* * *

The notion and introduction of Summertime which has never been popular amongst our agricultural population has been definitely discarded by the Federal Council.

* * *

The Swiss Postal service to the regions north of Rome has been resumed; it is being operated via Munich and Innsbruck.

* * *

Rumours of an early resumption of diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia are still persisting though no tentative announcement from official circles in Berne has so far appeared. The generally well-informed correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian" reports the following on January 26th: "Switzerland is the only neutral State in Europe that has never resumed diplomatic relations with Moscow since the

Russian Revolution, although many times during the past twenty years public opinion in favour of doing so has found expression in Parliamentary discussion. The Federal Council's refusal to take action was always supported, however, by a considerable majority in the Swiss Parliament, particularly during the long years of the late Dr. Motta's tenure of the Foreign Ministry. Motta may be said to have created an anti-Russian tradition in his country's foreign policy. The present demand for establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, though not universal, is certainly stronger than ever before. There is no doubt, however, that a decision by the Federal Council to reopen diplomatic relations with Russia would be endorsed by the greater part of the population.

Cantonal

The Federal statistical department has published some extremely interesting figures showing the extent and present distribution of wealth in Switzerland; these figures are based on data secured by the collection of the capital levy enacted to partly cover the cost of mobilisation (Wehropfer). The total net value of all the property so taxed is 21,645 million francs or 5,071 frs. per head of population. The individual cantons exhibit noticeable variations from the average. Baselstadt leads easily with Frs.9,573 while the canton Uri is at the bottom of the list with only Frs. 2,073 per head. Above the average are Geneva, Glarus, Zurich, Schaffhausen, Thurgau and the canton Vaud; somewhat remarkable is the fact that Glarus claims more riches than Zurich. The large canton Berne with its vast agriculture is slightly under the average while the "poor" Ticino beats the industrial Solothurn. Appenzell A.Rh. possesses more than twice the wealth of Appenzell I.Rh. Towns with over 100,000 inhabitants average over Frs.

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ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal. Démissions.
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Monsieur André Duprat nous parlera de

"La Résistance française et la Reconstruction de la France."

Les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire pas plus tard que le 4 mars auprès de M. P. A. Moehr, Hon. Sec., Imperial House, Kingsway, W.C.2.

LE COMITE.

8,300 which is about double the ratio recorded in predominantly rural districts.

The well-known Hotel Rigi-Staffel has been acquired by the town of Lucerne for 142,000 francs and with additional adjoining land under negotiation will be converted into a holiday home for the children of the canton.

The socialist group of the Zurich Grosse Rat is asking the Federal Council to facilitate — when elaborating the present financial reform — its application to cantonal methods.

The Fribourg government in order to encourage the insurance against damage caused by hail storms is assisting the farming community by contributing up to 30% of the respective premiums.

Grindelwald has elected the new Federal Councilor Ernst Nobs an honorary citizen; he passed his early youth in this famous village where his mother is still living.

The canton Schaffhausen has voted nearly half a million francs to indemnify its civil servants for the increased cost of living; the Grosse Rat has also lowered the naturalisation fees for foreigners of limited means.

The hamlet of Guarda in the Grisons is described as a jewel of middle-age rustic architecture. Over 800

years old with the enviable reputation of having escaped fires and other calamities the buildings have been repaired and restored to their original form by the local inhabitants assisted financially by associations for the preservation of historic sites.

In the Ticino a silent election for the two representatives in the States Council (Ständerat) is likely to be recorded on the 27th inst. as two candidates only have been nominated. They are Antonio Antonini (conservative) and Vecchio Bossi (Radical).

At a meeting of the regional inhabitants of Brissago a unanimous resolution was passed to oppose the project of constructing an artificial lake in the valley.

The archaic and totally un-natural frontier conditions which exist in the Lago Maggiore region (not unlike the state of affairs at the opposite end of our country in the canton Schaffhausen) seem to have kindled the restive spirit of the few Campione inhabitants who in normal times derive considerable benefit from this quaint state of affairs. The "Daily Telegraph," January 31st, refers to an incident nowhere else reported; here it is: "I learn that the coup d'état in miniature Campione on Lake Lugano, was prompted by economic rather than political motives. The enclave of Campione is surrounded by Swiss territory and only amounts in all to something under 300 acres. Already there are signs that the inhabitants, who number hardly 1,000, are somewhat overawed by their own action. They are now denying that what has happened is classifiable as a "coup d'état." They have however, placed themselves under the jurisdiction of the Italian Legation at Berne, which owes allegiance to King Vicor Emmanuel, not to the neo-Fascists. The territory, of course, remains Italian. They have asked for an Italian special commissioner from Berne to help solve the problem. No supplies have been sent from Italy for four months and purchases in Switzerland in Swiss francs are almost prohibitive. In 1919 a movement was started to establish an independent republic. This "revolt" was soon quelled. About 10 years later Campione again came into the world news when an anti-Fascist was enticed from Lugano to Campione. The victim failed to realise he was on Italian territory until it was too late. He was given a sentence of 30 years' imprisonment."

The centenary of the birth of Numa Droz was celebrated on January 27th at Neuchâtel when the president of the Grand Conseil and other high officials paid tribute to the memory of the great statesman. Numa Droz was born in La-Chaux-de-Fonds, was apprenticed to an engraver and devoted his hours of leisure to academic studies; for some years he had to help in supporting his family. Soon after taking over the editorship of a local journal he interested himself eagerly in local and Federal politics. At the early age of 31 he was elected to the Federal Council and was President of the Confederation in 1881 and 1887. He retired from public affairs in 1892 and remains with us as the author of several important works notably the History of Switzerland in the 19th century; he died at the age of 55.

Jean Louis Gerber, a pioneer in the viticulture of the canton Neuchâtel, died at Corcelles after a long

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illness at the age of 63. He was President of the cantonal vine-growing association and acted as Federal expert in matters concerning the industry generally.

Ruins have been accidentally unearthed near St. Blaise of a Roman villa; further operations are being directed by a group of archaeologists.

A meeting of musicians of Geneva convened by the director of the local "conservatoire" appointed a small committee to draw up rules and the constitution of a professional association whose membership would be limited to qualified musicians. This is to restrict the existing practice that practically anybody can style himself a professor of music.

Army

Our Defence Minister, Federal Councillor Karl Kobelt, addressed on January 24th a conference of Civil Defence Instructors at Winterthur; the following are a few translated extracts from the speech cabled by the correspondent of the "Daily Express," January 26th:

Defence measures will be taken immediately if the necessity arises. These measures will vary, depending on the character of the danger — whether it be a surprise attack, or a long-planned invasion, or whether the Swiss Army will have to bar transit to a foreign army.

Great events are likely to happen at any moment now. There can be no doubt about it. The danger that Switzerland might be closely influenced by these events increases more and more.

The watchfulness and preparedness of the army and people should not be relaxed in any circumstances. We are all ready for being called to arms at any moment.

Our people are prepared to pay the highest price — the lives of our sons — for national independence and freedom.

The fighting strength of the Swiss Army has continually increased. Our frontier and inland fortifications have reached considerable strength — £38,000,000 has been spent on their improvement.

Practically all the fortifications are ready to be manned, and those still building can be turned to immediate use.

Considerable areas have been fortified with trenches, ditches, walls, and mines which can be exploded at a moment's notice.

During the first world war Switzerland produced only rifles, revolvers and machine guns, but to-day it has extended its own production to practically all arms including airplanes.

Switzerland has spent £87,000,000 on improving her arms.

Much attention has been given to the improvement of anti-tank and anti-air weapons.

The motorisation of the Swiss Army has progressed with great strides. Great underground stores have been constructed which are now housing immense quantities of food, fuel and other vital goods to enable the nation to live and fight within "the fortress of Switzerland" should it be besieged.

The Federal Council is continuously and carefully following external developments, and the extent of Swiss mobilisation will always be gauged to the events around us.

Economical

The Swiss Bank Corporation announce that the accounts for the year 1943 show net profits including the carry forward from the previous year of Swiss Frs. 10,241,943 against Swiss Frs. 9,875,180 for 1942. The total assets at the end of 1943 amounted to Swiss Frs. 1,473,255,671 against Swiss Frs. 1,366,433,327. At the General Meeting which is to be held on the 25th February, 1944, a dividend of 4% will be proposed as for the previous year. The carry forward will amount to Swiss Frs. 3,841,942.81 against Swiss Frs. 3,475,189.57 for the previous year.

Traffic

We have already intimated in a previous issue that the fares and rates on the Swiss Federal Railways and privately owned systems will be subjected to a modest increase. This increase comes into force as from the 1st of April this year and it is meritorious to point out that of all the large European traffic undertakings the Swiss railways are the only ones that have so far maintained their pre-war fares and rates for 4½ years. These changes are dealt with by the "Railway Gazette," February 11th, which says:

"Rates in respect of goods, express goods, luggage, and livestock are to be increased by 10 per cent., but no increase is to be applied for distances over 150 km., (93 miles). This is in special consideration of the demands advanced by Geneva and the Canton of Ticino, the economic life of both of which would have been affected particularly adversely through the application of a standard increase, as they are some distance from the economically more important regions in the north and the centre of the country. In respect of these two regions, the increase is to be approximately 6 per cent.

Single passenger fares will be increased by 13 per cent., but return fares, which represent about 80 per cent. of the railway passenger traffic in Switzerland, will be higher by 10 per cent. only. Moreover, no higher increase will be applied to return tickets than fr.1.70 for the second class and fr.1.20 for the third class. The price for family tickets will not be increased. No decision has been taken yet, but it is contemplated to raise the age limit for children travelling free from 4 to 6 years, and for children paying half fare from 12 to 16 years, as a compensation for passengers travelling with children.

The higher yield accruing from these increases

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is expected to amount to frs.25 to 30 million per annum for the Swiss Federal Railways, and to frs10 to 12 million for the private railways and shipping services on the lakes. In the case of the Swiss Federal Railways, the surplus accruing from these increases is to be employed exclusively for railway financial reconstruction and is to be paid into a special fund. Of the increased receipts of the privately-owned transport undertakings, 20 per cent. is to be paid into a special equalisation fund, out of which working losses are to be covered. This fund is to be administered jointly by the Railway Department and the private transport undertakings."

Rationing

The Swiss bread ration will be increased from 7½oz. to 8oz. from March 1st. It will contain 20 per cent. of potato flour. In this connection the following comment from the Berne correspondent of the "Sunday Express," and published on February 6th, offers interesting reading:

"Table talk in Switzerland to-day centres on the new food decree under which from March 1st potato bread will be a compulsory ration.

"Will this mean an epidemic of stomach aches?" asked one newspaper.

The Government, anticipating such a question, had the answer pat — Professor Zeller, food expert, of Basle University, was ready to testify that potato bread does the digestion no harm as long as the proportion of potato flour to wheat flour is not more than 30 per cent.

In the new bread it will only be 20 per cent.

Professor Zeller says that experiments with Basle students have actually shown potato bread is beneficial to the digestion.

It should be noted that the use of potato flour is due not to a shortage of cereals but to an unexpected surplus of potatoes.

Farmers urged to cultivate every square foot of soil have done their job so well that the authorities have 2,000 car loads of potatoes to be used up.

It is expected that these will be finished in three months. The Swiss can then go back to normal wheat-bread."

Humanitarian

According to latest reports the number of refugees cared for in Switzerland reaches nearly 80,000 over 10,500 being German officers and men who have become detached from their units. In order to ease the heavy financial burden the Federal government is offering to release any of these internees who — subject to certain conditions and guarantees — can find work with employers or a home with Swiss families.

At a conference given at Zurich Prof. Max Huber stated that the expenses of the International Red Cross Committee which consists entirely of Swiss citizens are now Frs.700,000 per month.

The Federal Council has granted a credit of Frs. 250,000 for the establishment of special university camps to enable the 515 Italian students — all military internees — to continue their studies at the universities of Fribourg, Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchâtel.

Youth organisations will receive over a million francs, the approximate result of the traditional First of August appeal.

Unqualified success has followed the experiments made during the last few years in curing whooping cough by taking children so affected on an aerial trip to a 4,000 meter ceiling.

A committee has already been formed under the chairmanship of National Councillor Colonel Eugen Bircher to collect funds for the erection of a monument to keep alive the memory of the present mobilisation, similar to the "Rangiers" after the last war.

A very efficient and enthusiastic worker in the cause of the International Red Cross disappeared with the sudden death of Dr. Fritz Paravicini (no relation of our former minister). The cause so far remains a mystery but it has been stated that he died suddenly at Tokio after returning from an inspection tour to internment camps in Formosa. The following is the obituary published by "The Times," on February 3rd:

"The International Red Cross committee has learned that their delegate in Japan, Dr. Fritz Paravicini, has died after a short illness.

Born at Glaris, Switzerland, he went in 1904 to Japan, where he built up in Tokyo an extensive medical practice which included many members of foreign Embassies and Legations. For many years he had taken a close interest in the work of the Red Cross, which he represented in Japan throughout the 1914-18 war.



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In 1934 he was a prominent figure at the International Red Cross Congress in Tokyo. During the present war he served as first principal delegate of the International Red Cross and had an assistant working with him.

So far as he was permitted he visited and reported on prisoners of war camps in Japan itself, doing everything possible to help prisoners and to obtain for the camp such local supplies as were available. He had not had opportunities of visiting Hong-Kong or Shanghai."

Copious rains have fallen on the northern slopes of the Alps constituting a serious danger of avalanches in the mountain districts of central Switzerland.

In the canton Glarus several districts have suffered through avalanches; just above Engi four houses were buried.

The village of Morcles has suffered badly by blast caused by the force of an avalanche that just missed it; a neighbouring forest was ravaged and a bridge collapsed under the weight of the accumulated snow.

The road along the lake of Brienz was temporarily closed to traffic owing to danger from avalanches.

An avalanche descended on the road near Nesselthal and carried away a farmer.

The heavy fall of snow causing the appearance of the "Geistberg" avalanche interrupted railway traffic on the 10th inst. on the Gotthard line near Amsteg.

LA LIGNE DU BRENNER.

Cette ligne, aujourd'hui célèbre, était autrefois d'intérêt secondaire. Elle desservait l'ancienne province autrichienne du Tyrol. Elle a acquis ces derniers temps, par suite de l'évolution de la situation militaire, une importance extraordinaire.

La ligne du Brenner proprement dite, c'est-à-dire le tronçon qui relie Innsbruck à Bozen, a 125 km. de long. Au temps où la domination autrichienne s'étendait encore sur l'Italie septentrionale, elle établissait, par le col du Brenner (1370 m.), la liaison entre le nord du Tyrol et la partie sud de cette province et la Vénétie. Des comptes rendus datant de la période de construction disent que cette ligne fut considérée comme une œuvre appelée à faire date dans l'histoire. La ligne du Brenner a certainement joué un rôle considérable dans le développement des relations commerciales et du trafic entre l'Allemagne et l'Italie.

Les travaux de construction furent entrepris en 1864, et durèrent jusqu'en 1867. A cette époque, les ingénieurs n'avaient pas encore beaucoup d'expérience dans l'établissement des chemins de fer de montagne. Aussi les infiltrations d'eau dans les tunnels, la construction de ponts sur les gorges et de puissants murs de soutènement, posaient-ils des problèmes épineux. La construction du tunnel du Mont-Cenis, achevée en 1871, et qui exigea huit bonnes années d'un dur et difficile labeur, en fournit un exemple.

La ligne fut terminée en quatre ans. Cette rapidité démontre l'importance que les constructeurs de la ligne du Brenner attribuaient à la liaison de l'Italie septentrionale avec Innsbruck et l'Autriche. Il convient d'ajouter que, depuis 1859, une ligne, de 174 km. de longueur, reliait Bozen à Vérone.

La ligne du Brenner a été ouverte à l'exploitation le 24 août 1867. Son inauguration, bien que constituant un important événement, fut célébrée simplement. La Maison impériale d'Autriche était en effet en deuil de l'empereur Maximilien, frère de l'empereur François-Joseph, fusillé peu de temps auparavant au Mexique.

La période de construction fut, vers la fin, marquée par des difficultés financières, qui engagèrent le Gouvernement autrichien à vendre à une entreprise privée, tant la ligne du Brenner inachevée que les autres lignes dont l'Etat était propriétaire. La ligne du Brenner passa alors à un consortium de capitalistes français, anglais et italiens. Il semble même que des capitaux suisses aient été engagés dans l'entreprise. L'affaire ne se termina pas très brillamment.

Outre les difficultés financières dans lesquelles cette ligne alpestre dut se débattre pendant sa construction, elle eut encore fort à souffrir d'événements politiques. L'Autriche soutint contre la Prusse, en 1866, une guerre malheureuse, qui l'affaiblit considérablement. Le jeune royaume d'Italie profita des difficultés de sa voisine pour élargir ses frontières. Après la campagne de 1866, la Vénétie lui échut. Pendant cette campagne, les travaux de la ligne du Brenner furent complètement paralysés. Remarquons enfin que le percement du tunnel du "Muhletal," sur le versant septentrional du Brenner, posa des problèmes particulièrement difficiles, à raison des fortes infiltrations d'eau qui menaçaient d'anéantir l'ouvrage. Il fallut les combattre par tous les moyens. Grâce à l'énergie infatigable de l'ingénieur Charles Etzel, âme de l'en-

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